Green your scheme by recycling
By Rob Paddock

How can we reduce the amount of rubbish our scheme's units produce?

The answer is simple: practice the three Rs.
1. Reduce
2. Reuse
3. Recycle

In this article, we'll take a look at the last point: **recycling**. Specifically, we'll define the practical steps you can take to implement a recycling program in your scheme.

Separating your waste

A good place to start is to encourage all your scheme's occupants to set up three bins in their units: an "organic" bin for the compost heap, a "dry" recyclables bin and a bin for non-recyclable waste. This will help you to sort your waste at the source.

If there is no room in small flats to keep a number of different recycling bins, an alternative is to keep just one other container (that could be as simple as a plastic shopping bag) for all recyclable tins, bottles and paper. While it is not ideal to mix the various types of recyclable materials, it is still better than not recycling at all.

Not everyone in your scheme will be as dedicated to recycling as you may be. It is important to make it as easy as possible for occupants to recycle in order to achieve the best results. If your scheme has a caretaker that takes out the rubbish on "bin day", make sure that all occupants' three bins are left in an easily accessible spot. The caretaker can then place the contents of the three bins in the right place. Namely, the rubbish in the regular bin, the recycling in the separated recycling bins (more on that below), and the organic waste on the compost heap or worm farm (more on that in my next article).

What materials are recyclable, and how should they be separated?

Below is a general list of materials that can be recycled. However, you must find out what your nearest recycling depot accepts. Do not dump materials at a depot that does not recycle those particular materials – this will make your waste their headache! Bear in mind that recycled materials must be rinsed out before they can be recycled.

Tins and metals

Metals are used to make new products of the same quality, conserving irreplaceable natural resources. Recycling tins and cans saves about 95% of the energy needed to make a new can from iron ore. There is a huge demand for all steel scrap metals worldwide. South Africa exports up to 50% of the scrap that it recovers. It does not matter if cans are crushed, rusted or burnt – they can all be recycled.

Cardboard and paper

Cardboard and paper are excellent materials for recycling. For every ton of paper recycled, 17 trees are saved, 40% less energy and 30% less water is needed to make paper.

Do not recycle the following cardboard and paper products:

- Carbon paper
- Dog food bags, potato bags, wax-coated boxes
- Wet or dirty paper (tissues, paper towels, food wrappings, paper with spills)
- Self-adhesive paper (post-it notes)
- Chemically treated fax or photographic paper
- Wax- or plastic-coated packaging for liquids (milk cartons)

Plastics

Plastics generally do not degrade as they are made from petroleum-based chemicals (oil, coal and gas). They can be a problem to recycle because they are often combined with other materials. Plastics are made from different plastic polymers. It is important that similar plastics are recycled together. Find out from your nearest drop-off centre what plastic types they accept. In general, plastics with a recycle logo and identification number (e.g. PET, or No. 1, in the recycle triangle) can be recycled. If you are at all uncertain about which plastics may or may not be recycled, ask at your local drop-off centre.

Glass bottles and jars

Recycling a glass bottle saves enough electricity to light a 100 W bulb for four hours. For every ton of glass recycled, 1,2 tons of raw materials and 114 litres of oil energy are saved. It is important to remove bottle tops and corks from glass bottles and containers. Certain glass products cannot be recycled.

Getting the recycling to the local depot

When your schemes recycling program is in full swing, you may need to drop off the recycling at a local depot once a week. If there are willing members of the body corporate, you could consider taking turns to shuttle the recycling to the depot. If not, you should consider hiring a company to pick up the recycling for you.

The process of recycling is very simple. If you are serious about making a change, bear in mind that it takes 21 days to break a habit. Be dedicated to changing your habits towards waste for 21 days, and suddenly it will become second nature. In my next article for Paddocks Press, we'll have a look at feasible composting options for your scheme's organic waste.

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